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Chairman: Ms. COOMBS (New Zealand)
(Vice-Chairman)

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In the absence of the Chairman, Ms. Coombs (New Zealand), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 107: OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (A/45/12 and Add.1, A/45/378, A/45/449, A/45/450, A/45/480, A/45/649 and Corr.1 and Add.1)

1. Mr. STAFFORD (Officer in Charge of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said the work of UNHCR during the past year had been hampered by a shortage of every type of resource because the number of refugees had more than doubled between 1980 and 1990, while the resources available to UNHCR had remained stable. For the first time in its history, UNHCR had had a budget deficit in 1989 representing 10 per cent of its target budget and had had to cut refugee programmes and administration costs down to the bare essentials.

2. Those programme-cutting exercises had prevented UNHCR from meeting many of its obligations to helpless refugees and impoverished host countries. UNHCR did not have the luxury of selecting its projects or determining whom to help; it had to give priority to "life-sustaining" activities. Durable solutions had had to be postponed for lack of money, there were no funds for education and it had not been possible to maintain refugee camp infrastructure and buffer stocks in countries like Malawi where the refugee programme had damaged roads and destroyed forests. In addition, fresh crises, such as the exodus of refugees from Liberia, had arisen, and as the number of refugees grew, the need for funds also increased. Another more recent crisis had occurred when refugees had fled Rwanda, and UNHCR was working with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, OAU and the Governments concerned in an attempt to find a solution to that problem. It was never possible to back away from a refugee crisis; UNHCR simply had to step in and attempt to meet needs wherever and whenever they occurred.

3. The resource issue was reflected in the 1989 report of the UNHCR Board of Auditors to the General Assembly, in which the problem of raising voluntary funds was touched upon and reference was made to the need to establish effective funding arrangements to ensure the financial security of the High Commissioner's Office. Even as he spoke, UNHCR required another $23 million to fund its general programmes and would not know whether or not it had survived the financial year until 31 December.

4. The unpredictability of UNHCR funding made long-range planning impossible. Its Executive Committee had approved a target figure of $US 345.5 million for the general programme for 1991. While it was unclear that that amount would meet its needs, it was necessary to know whether it could be reasonably expected to materialize. Countries could put the UNHCR programmes on a firmer footing by making unconditional pledges at the forthcoming pledging conference. Help was badly needed, not only from traditional UNHCR donors but also from the emerging new economic Powers.

(Mr. Stafford)

5. There were currently about 15 million people in the world who did not enjoy the protection of their own Government. With political will, money and patience, a solution could be found for each one of them. In 1990 UNHCR had returned some 43,000 Namibian exiles to their own country, and Chilean refugees had also returned in larger numbers than ever before. About 175,000 Afghans and 30,000 Central Americans had also returned to their home countries, as had thousands of Vietnamese. As recent events in the Middle East and Central America testified, unresolved refugee problems caused tension, aggression and conflict, while finding solutions for refugees was a practical contribution to world security and stability. An estimated total of 26 million people had ceased to be refugees in the past 40 years, and it was hoped that that figure would increase in 1991 as refugees from South Africa, Mozambique, Western Sahara and Cambodia returned home through voluntary repatriation, which was the ideal solution to the refugee problem in today's political climate.

6. Another major UNHCR task was to ensure the granting of asylum to those fleeing persecution and oppression inasmuch as the protection of refugees was a corner-stone of human rights and essential to global security and stability. For many countries a much larger issue was that of migratory flows, a problem which had to be dealt with through economic and development aid. The reality of mass exoduses could not be ignored and needed to be placed on the world's political agenda. If the problem was not dealt with by the international community, UNHCR would find it increasingly difficult to identify and protect refugees who fell within its competence.

7. Mr. MEZZALAMA (Italy), speaking on behalf of the European Economic Community (EEC), said that the Community had always fulfilled its obligations and had been a major source of financial assistance to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The Community was concerned about the decline in the financial resources and in the morale of the Office and had been gratified by the new climate of confidence created under the leadership of the High Commissioner and his Deputy. It, therefore, deeply regretted the sudden resignation of the High Commissioner, but looked forward to the appointment of a new High Commissioner with a single determination to fulfil his mandate who would enjoy the confidence of all regions.

8. All appropriate political and economic measures should be taken to deal with and prevent refugee flows, and to restore humane conditions so that the refugees could return to their countries of origin in safety and dignity. The countries of origin should bear the primary responsibility for creating those conditions and external aid should only be a complementary measure.

9. As the flows of refugees and asylum seekers continued to grow and the need for durable solutions to refugee situations world wide became more acute, ever-increasing levels of financial assistance were required. Sustained support from traditional donors would be inadequate and new donors would be needed, as well as more constructive and concrete inter-agency co-operation.

READEX FICHE

(Mr. Mezzalama, Italy)

10. Such a strategy represented a double challenge both to the international community, especially the wealthy countries which had not yet contributed and to the specialized agencies to improve burden-sharing and to ensure that the refugee dimension was reflected in their operational projects. He called on Governments, through their participation in the governing bodies of agencies, to facilitate that process in which the Community would also play its part.

11. Despite the profound changes in the world and the prospects of a better and more peaceful future observed recently in Eastern Europe, the world situation had a disturbing potential for conflict and for more refugee flows. One such example was the present situation in Iraq and Kuwait where thousands of Kuwaiti citizens and almost 1 million third-country nationals had been displaced.

12. In addition to refugee flows, there were significant migratory movements caused by developmental and environmental problems and natural disasters. The link between those two phenomena required a comprehensive approach but one which nevertheless distinguished between them. The EEC, therefore, welcomed the convening of the Temporary Executive Committee Working Group for UNHCR on protection and durable solutions and hoped that it would arrive at conclusions conducive to solving those problems.

13. Key elements in a comprehensive approach to refugee flows were an amelioration of the economic conditions of the regions of origin and reintegration through economic and development assistance. The International Conference on Central American Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons (CIREFCA) was a pioneering example of that approach. The EEC had taken the initiative of elaborating a programme of reintegration assistance to Viet Nam as part of the solution of the refugee problem in South-East Asia.

14. The European Economic Community reaffirmed its adherence to the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951 and the Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees of 1967 and the need to preserve the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; it wished the true nature of asylum to be maintained and limited to refugees and not used to accommodate the aspirations of economic migrants.

15. The international community's commendable achievements over the years had been achieved through the concerted efforts of the countries of first asylum, the countries of resettlement, the donor community and the countries of origin but no meaningful results would have been possible without the presence and effective functioning of UNHCR and the responsibility it had assumed for refugee protection in particular. He called on more countries to accede to the Geneva Convention of 1951 and to the Protocol of 1967 and pledged the Community's full support to UNHCR in the challenging times ahead.

16. Ms. MAJ-LIS LÖÖW (Sweden) said that multilateral action was required to deal with regional and global refugee problems. Eighty per cent of the world's refugees came from seven areas of the world and in three of them positive changes had taken place in the past year and a half. The Comprehensive Plan of Action on Indo-Chinese

(Ms. Maj-Lis Lööw, Sweden)

Refugees was in itself a multilateral achievement. The situation in Cambodia gave reason for hope of a gradual solution but the hundreds of thousands of refugees who were about to return there should do so voluntarily. The changes in South Africa augured well for many to return and it was hoped that other refugees in the region, particularly the Mozambicans, would also be able to return. He pointed out that the process initiated following the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) had contributed to peace in Central America and to solving the refugee problem there.

17. Nevertheless, those were all tenuous achievements and required the full commitment of the international community if they were to be sustained. In the other four areas, except for Liberia, the refugee situations had become protracted. The majority of refugees were children and young people who had been uprooted and lacked the basic requirements for their proper growth and development. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child had served to emphasize the world's responsibility towards them.

18. The promotion of human rights, development assistance, a generous asylum policy, voluntary repatriation, and a generous family reunification policy were all interrelated and should form part of a comprehensive policy on refugee and migratory flows. The basic principle of protection was in many instances not respected and Sweden's first concern was to ensure that it was upheld. Because of UNHCR's inadequate financing, refugees were being deprived of their basic human rights. More equal sharing of responsibility for improving the life of the poor in all regions would help to solve the refugee problem. Sweden was deeply concerned by the massive migratory flows of persons fleeing poverty, hunger, ecological disasters, human rights violations and internal and external conflicts.

19. The pressures created by both refugee and migratory flows represented a new challenge to international solidarity. Solutions should be sought first, by addressing the root causes by promoting democracy, respect for human rights, peace and development; secondly, by upholding the international principles of protection, assistance and by insisting on durable solutions through effective and adequate funding of UNHCR; and, thirdly, by recognizing the implications of present and potential refugee and migratory flows.

20. Those issues should be tackled at the highest level of political leadership and given high priority on the international political agenda. Since the international community was not able to solve the refugee problem in its present dimension, it could hardly be expected to overcome it if it grew worse. A concerted effort by the countries, UNHCR and the entire United Nations system as well as the non-governmental organizations to implement a new global strategy was therefore needed.

21. Archbishop MARTINO (Observer for the Holy See) said that the Church continued to support the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and participate actively in its work. It was disturbing to note that while the number of refugees had almost doubled since 1980, the Office now had little more than half the amount of assistance available for each refugee than it had had

(Archbishop Martino, Observer, Holy See)

10 years earlier. The Holy See continued to devote vast amounts of personnel and resources to provide assistance to millions of people in refugee camps in countries of first asylum and final settlement. Public opinion must be kept informed about the problem of refugees in order to ensure that it remained at the top of the international agenda.

22. Solidarity rooted in charity should be fostered to promote a new era of international co-operation in which States would work together to solve existing refugee problems and prevent the emergence of new ones. In some areas, positive political developments could reduce new migratory flows and enable refugees to return to their own countries. While reaffirming that there should be no forced repatriation of any refugees, the Holy See had noted with interest the proposal of the High Commissioner for expanded assistance to returnees, especially in such areas as primary health care, vocational training and job creation. Such projects would facilitate the reintegration of the returnees and curb the exodus of people leaving countries for economic and social reasons.

23. Parallel projects in the field of health care, basic education and vocational training should be implemented from the point of arrival in a refugee camp to the final point of settlement. Lastly, it was imperative to respect the fundamental rights of every refugee in order to ensure justice for all.

24. Mr. TISSOT (United Kingdom) said that his Government would continue to give its full support to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. In 1990, it had thus far committed approximately $132 million to UNHCR programmes and had contributed further substantial sums through the European Community. He welcomed the Office's measures to achieve a balanced budget, including a reduction in staff and rationalization of offices in the field. The aim must be to ensure that available resources were targeted towards direct refugee assistance.

25. As in 1989, UNHCR had once again reported an increase in its refugee case-load world wide. Many refugee situations were long established and the search for lasting solutions, particularly through voluntary repatriation, was often a long process. His country welcomed the efforts made by UNHCR in 1990 to promote repatriation programmes. The Office had also had to respond to new emergency situations, such as the crisis in Liberia and Iraq's brutal invasion of Kuwait. Although UNHCR had recognized only a small minority of those leaving Kuwait as refugees, the Office had played an invaluable advisory role in responding effectively to that crisis.

26. After UNHCR's success in 1989 in convening the International Conference on Indo-Chinese Refugees, progress in implementing the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees had been mixed. First asylum countries continued to shoulder the heavy burden of large numbers of asylum-seekers, the vast majority of whom were found not to be legitimate refugees. The Comprehensive Plan of Action must be implemented in full and that included the return of all non-refugees to their countries of origin. He commended the publicity efforts of UNHCR in Viet Nam

(Mr. Tissot, United Kingdom)

to deter future outflows other than through the orderly departure programme. Furthermore, the initiative of the European Community to fund a substantial programme of reintegration assistance would benefit migrants returning home as well as the communities from which they came.

27. The United Kingdom would remain a major supporter of UNHCR programmes and would give careful consideration to the Office's proposals to ensure greater predictability of income for better programme planning. At the same time, he urged UNHCR to intensify its efforts to widen the donor base to include additional funding from non-traditional sources.

28. Mr. JIN Yong (China) said that, although some headway had been made in solving long-term refugee problems, the overall refugee situation throughout the world had not improved and some problems had become more acute. Some countries had showed less concern about the refugee question and had made smaller contributions, with the result that UNHCR was facing serious financial difficulties. Priority should be given to preventive measures in dealing with refugee questions. The international community must work together to promote peace and development and eliminate the causes of the large refugee flows. Efforts must be made to change the unjust world economic order and alleviate the economic difficulties of the developing countries to enable refugees to return home and prevent further migratory movements.

29. Joint efforts by the international community were required to solve the problem of refugees. Most first asylum countries were developing countries and the influx of large numbers of refugees increased their political and economic difficulties. China favoured combining refugee assistance with development aid programmes in order to ensure benefits both for the refugees themselves and the host countries. It supported the continued implementation of the Comprehensive Programme of Action adopted at the International Conference on Indo-Chinese Refugees and the Concerted Plan of Action adopted at the International Conference on Central American Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons. The traditional donor countries should be commended for their very substantial contributions.

30. The financial difficulties facing UNHCR were cause for concern. The world community should broaden its co-operation with the countries and international agencies concerned and increase its financial assistance in order to solve the urgent problems facing UNHCR. Developed countries, in particular, should assume their share of the burden and provide more humanitarian aid and resettlement opportunities through the Office and to asylum countries.

31. Over the years, China had maintained good co-operative relations with UNHCR in accepting and making arrangements for Indo-Chinese refugees. As a State party to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, China fulfilled its obligations in that regard and did its utmost to provide protection and assistance to refugees. In a spirit of humanitarianism, it had accepted and helped settle nearly 300,000 Indo-Chinese refugees and had allocated considerable funds to ensure their education, employment and livelihood. China would continue

(Mr. Jin Yong, China)

to increase its co-operation with UNHCR and the parties concerned in order to bring about a comprehensive and lasting solution to the refugee problem.

32. Mr. JABBI (Sierra Leone) said that during the period under review, significant steps had been taken by the international community to alleviate the plight of refugees in various parts of the world, including southern Africa, Central America and South-East Asia. In his report (A/45/12), the High Commissioner for Refugees had emphasized the need for durable solutions to refugee issues. The delegation of Sierra Leone fully agreed that it would be tragic if the entry of large numbers of refugees into Sierra Leone were allowed to continue indefinitely; however, in the absence of durable solutions, it was necessary to provide host countries with relief and assistance.

33. Over the past six months, Sierra Leone had been compelled to host more than 200,000 Liberian refugees and several thousand displaced persons of other nationalities. The international community seemed to have avoided confronting the situation prevailing in Liberia, which had few parallels in modern African history. Although Liberia was not an oil-producing country and had not been overrun by a powerful neighbour, it was experiencing a crisis, and a crisis in any part of the world was an assault on world peace. The international community might be unaware that in Liberia, families and whole communities had been displaced, placing tremendous stress on the fragile economies of its neighbours. His delegation urged all peace-loving States to support the ECOWAS plan on Liberia, which offered the best hope for the return of peace and stability to that country.

34. It now seemed clear that the deplorable refugee situation could well extend far into 1991 and that the number of refugees might escalate. The assistance provided for their welfare and for strengthening the capacity of Sierra Leone to carry the burden they imposed fell far below expectations. He appealed to the international community to increase its relief assistance to a level commensurate with the requirements. At the same time, Sierra Leone expressed its gratitude to those countries and governmental and non-governmental organizations which had supported programmes to help Sierra Leone to cope with the situation. He assured the Committee that Sierra Leone would discharge its humanitarian responsibilities towards the refugees and appealed for greater understanding of the adverse impact of the situation upon the economy of Sierra Leone and also for increased development support.

AGENDA ITEM 108: INTERNATIONAL ACTION TO COMBAT DRUG ABUSE AND ILLICIT TRAFFICKING (continued)

Draft resolution A/C.3/45/L.38 (agenda item 108)

35. Mrs. DA SILVA (Venezuela), introducing draft resolution A/C.3/45/L.38, whose sponsors had been joined by Pakistan and Suriname, said that its purpose was to take note of the recommendations of the Intergovernmental Expert Group to Study the Economic and Social Consequences of Illicit Traffic in Drugs set forth in the report of the Secretary-General in document A/45/535. She referred in particular to operative paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the draft resolution.

(Mrs. Da Silva, Venezuela)

36. She then read out the following amendment: the words "and the comments of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs" should be inserted at the end of paragraph 4.

Draft resolution A/C.3/45/L.39 (agenda item 108)

37. Mrs. DA SILVA (Venezuela) introduced draft resolution A/C.3/45/L.39, whose sponsors had been joined by the United Kingdom and Madagascar, and read out the salient points of the draft resolution, referring in particular to the second and fourth preambular paragraphs and operative paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 5.

38. The sponsors had agreed on the following amendments: in the second preambular paragraph the words "and the Single Convention" should be inserted at the end of the fifth line and the words "amending the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs" in the seventh line should be deleted; the words "so that its provisions would be more effective universally" should be added at the end of paragraph 1; and the words "without prejudice to the provisions of any resolution authorizing reform of the United Nations structure for international drug abuse control" should be added at the end of paragraph 5.

39. On behalf of Venezuela, she proposed that in the second line of paragraph 7 "forty-sixth" should be replaced by "forty-seventh" so that, in the interests of rationalizing the Committee's work, the item should be discussed every two years, and that a similar provision should be included in draft resolutions on the implementation of international treaties already in force.

Draft resolution A/C.3/45/L.40 (agenda item 108)

40. Mr. MORA (Cuba) introduced the draft resolution, noting that it was designed to strengthen the struggle against drug abuse and illicit trafficking. He referred in particular to the third and fourth preambular paragraphs and to operative paragraphs 1, 2 and 3.

Draft resolution A/C.3/45/L.41 (agenda item 108)

41. Mr. KRENKEL (Austria) introduced the draft resolution and pointed out that the Netherlands, Pakistan and Suriname had now become sponsors. He outlined the main points of the draft resolution, with special reference to the fourth and fifth preambular paragraphs and operative paragraph 2.

Draft resolution A/C.3/45/L.43 (agenda item 108)

42. Mrs. ASHTON (Bolivia), introducing the draft resolution said that the sponsors, which should be augmented by the addition of Algeria, Bangladesh, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Guyana, Indonesia, Pakistan and Suriname, had expressed their views and concern in the preamble, in particular the first, third, fourth and ninth paragraphs. She also drew attention to operative paragraphs 3, 4, 5, 7 and 16.

(Mrs. Ashton, Bolivia)

43. She then read out the following amendments: in paragraph 3 the words "treatment and rehabilitation of drug addicts" should be inserted in the fourth line after the words "demand reduction", and in the penultimate line the words "elimination of illicit traffic" should be inserted after the word "crops" and the word "supervision" after "interdiction"; in paragraph 7 the acronym "(HONLEA)" should be inserted at the end of the second line. She also pointed out that in the English text of paragraph 3, the word at the end of the sixth line should be "substitute".

Draft resolution A/C.3/45/L.44 (agenda item 108)

44. Mrs. DIEGUEZ-ARMAS (Mexico), introducing draft resolution A/C.3/45/L.44, said that Hungary, Pakistan and Suriname had joined the sponsors. She outlined the main points of the draft resolution, with particular reference to paragraphs 3, 4, 7 and 11. She also drew attention to the following correction: in the second line of the last preambular paragraph the words "and that Convention" should be inserted after "1961".

Draft resolution A/C.3/45/L.45

45. Mr. RUMBA (Uganda) noted, in introducing draft resolution A/C.3/45/L.45, that the thrust of draft resolution A/C.3/45/L.44 was essentially to enhance and strengthen United Nations organs, institutions and mechanisms in order to enable them to deal in an effective manner with the menace of illicit drug production and trafficking. His delegation fully endorsed all measures to combat that problem, as was clearly reflected in its continued support of all drug control-related activities, and welcomed the measures proposed in draft resolution A/C.3/45/L.44 to strengthen drug control-related activities by creating a single control programme. It believed, however, that if that new programme was to meet with global success, it would necessarily have to be complemented by other measures, particularly affecting the least developed countries, which were the most vulnerable and least resistant to pressure in respect of illicit drug production and trafficking.

46. The United Nations African Institute for Crime Prevention and Treatment of Offenders had a central role to play in Africa in that regard. In spite of its limited human and financial resources, it had clearly demonstrated that with modest additional support, it could, and would, be of tremendous assistance to African countries in their struggle against the drug problem in all its aspects.

47. The implementation of the decision contained in draft resolution A/C.3/45/L.45 would require several million dollars from the 1990-1991 programme budget and more from the 1992-1993 budget. A considerable number of additional high level professional posts would also need to be financed directly out of the regular budget. His delegation would be addressing those implications and other aspects of draft resolution A/C.3/45/L.44 when the matter arose in the Fifth Committee. He pointed out that the request contained in draft resolution A/C.3/45/L.45 was very modest by comparison with the total financial implications of draft resolution A/C.3/45/L.44.

(Mr. Rumba, Uganda)

48. A clarion call to the war against illicit drug trafficking had been sounded, and Africa had responded to that call. He hoped that the sponsors of draft resolution A/C.3/45/L.44 would show the understanding and flexibility needed to ensure that their resolution was adopted by consensus, as amended.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.